

Play Reviews

The Threepenny Opera. Marc Blizstein adaptation of the Brecht/Weill musical play. Skylight Comic Opera, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. January 25-February 22, 1989.

George Grosz and the Weimar Republic were invoked in the program notes as the inspiration of director Victoria Bussert and designer Russel Borski, but this solid mounting of the Brecht/Weill masterpiece *The Threepenny Opera* had more eclectic roots. The multiple levels of satire expressed in this production not only returned the play to its roots in Germany of 1928, but brought it sharply into our time.

Musically, the Skylight production also brought us delightfully back to the artistic satire of John Gay's *Beggar's Opera*. By giving us trained voices instead of *sprechsingers*, the show resonated with that eighteenth century swipe at the popularity of Italian opera. The "Jealousy Duet" in Newgate prison harkened back delightfully to the musical oneupsmanship of Gay's Polly and Lucy.

It was the quality of the singing that set this production apart. Many of us have come to believe along with Brecht himself that some of his songs should not be sung too beautifully. But Leslie Fitzwater proved that "Pirate Jenny" need not be modeled after Lotte Lenya's distinctive style. The pain that Jenny feels need not be reflected in the quality of the voice, so long as it is embodied in the total performance. "The Barbara Song" sung by Michelle Sarkesian also benefited from the actress' fine voice. The nightclub singer portrayal complete with a rhinestone studded microphone added a level of contemporary musical satire, but the song still succeeded dramatically because the singer was also an actress who let us see the hurt behind Lucy's bravado.

There were a few times in this production when the good voices seem to get in the way of characterization, notably in Mrs. Peachum's "Ballad of Dependency." The failure here, however, was in the thinness of the characterization, not that the voice was too good for the role. The quality of the singing was this production's greatest strength. At the core of this strength was tenor White Eagle, who gave MacHeath the centrality the role requires through solid acting and excellent singing of what are after all the least melodic numbers in the show.

In this production the director aimed at making us aware of the bitter hypocrisy of a degenerate society. She succeeded by engaging us in blending

the amalgam of several levels of satire. We were given a pastiche of stylistic elements, costume, scenery, and properties whose appropriateness needed to be established. Macheath had long hair, a single red glove, an earring, leather trousers, and makeup approaching that of the performers in the rock band, KISS. The Streetsinger was a punk rocker in leather and studs with lacquered hair. He played the role of the minister by adding only a clerical collar and a silver crucifix hung from his left ear. Tiger Brown, the chief of the London police, wore a uniform that could have come from Montgomery, Alabama, and his policemen were in the brown shirts and Sam Brown belts of the early Nazis. Polly Peachum wore several nylon net prom dresses of the fifties, and her father was in pin-striped banker's blue. Jenny, Molly, Dolly and the other residents of the Wapping brothel wore the silk stockings, garters, chemises and teddys of their trade with Victorian high button shoes. The point was inescapable--no one time or place has a monopoly on degeneracy.

Ingenuity in overcoming the limitations of its cramped theatre is the hallmark of most Skylight productions. This one depended on locating and relocating four rolling pylons which showed a rough exterior on one side and a curved fun house mirror on the other. Three small trap doors with heavy clanging grates were used effectively, especially when they were used to light singers from below during the first act finale "The World is Mean." The problem of bringing on the titles of the scenes was handled by scrawling them as graffiti on the back wall, which in this theatre is all too close to the audience, and then picking out the appropriate legend at the appropriate time with a follow spot.

A consistent sense of amorality and brutality permeated the production, and the sugar coating which has marred many revivals of this script was successfully avoided. The reprieve that Brecht had retained from Gay's script is always a potential source of misinterpretation, but director Bussert avoided that with a pantomime conclusion. As the celebration of the reprieve wound up, we saw the beggars and whores return to their occupations in the streets. Then, out of the jostling crowds, Macheath and Jenny encountered each other one last time. The jackknife flashed swiftly and silently; before the chords of the Finale had finished echoing, Jenny had fallen dead, and we were back to the world where might makes right.

The Skylight Opera found a way to maintain the satiric relevance of this Brecht/Weill musical without compromising on the musical values or adulterating the dramatic ones. They showed again that they are one of the premiere musical theatre companies in the Midwest. Audiences can only hope that they will soon find their way out of their cracker box theatre into a performance facility that is worthy of their work.

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The judges in *Danton's Death* at the *Deutsches Theater*. Photo by Pepita Engel.

Danton's Death. Deutsches Theater, East Berlin, Germany, June 14, 1989.

In June 1989 the Deutsches Theater announced final performances of several popular plays which had been in the repertory for many years. I was fortunate enough to get a ticket for the last performance of *Danton's Death* which had enjoyed notable success in East Germany and in the West as well. Walking to the theatre I fell into conversation with a man from West Berlin who had come to see the play because the acting was supposed to be extraordinary. About three blocks from the theatre a young man asked if we were returning a ticket to the box office and he responded, "Are you joking?" Hopeful people asked the same question all the way to the theatre, and at the box office was a very long line of more hopeful people. Inside the theatre I spoke to a young worker about the play and he remarked that "of course" he had seen the play before as it had been in the repertory for nine years. People of varying economic levels can easily afford to attend the theatre often as the prices are so low. I was in the second row and was surrounded by a mixture of middle-class couples, older persons, young workers, and students--not what one would see in the orchestra in a New York theatre.

Much of the excitement centered on the acting as all forty-three roles were played by the original cast of eleven actors. The leading actor, Christian Grashof (whom I had seen in January in a thrilling production of *Life is a Dream*), played both Robespierre and Danton. The very popular actor Kurt Bøwe played seven small roles. Actors played people screaming for more

blood, and in later scenes played the victims of the revolution. The impact of this doubling was a wonderful irony which emphasized Büchner's point that when the infernal machine is set in motion oppressors can soon become the oppressed--one is screaming for one's own blood. The acting was all that had been promised. As Danton/Robespierre, Grashof was extraordinary in his range and in the subtlety of his dual characterization. For Robespierre he put on a powdered wig and glasses and altered his voice, and in one scene he played both characters with dazzling effect. With a play performed in repertory for years, the actors have a chance to polish their characterizations without tiring of them. This play was one of twenty in the repertory and had played about once a month in the past year. There is naturally a wonderful sense of ensemble--one of the dramaturgs, Michael Hamburger, remarked to me that when the actors begin to rehearse a new play they are further in half an hour than a cast in another kind of production would be in two weeks.

I was eager to see the costumes and scenery by Volker Pfüller since I had been so impressed by the same artist's work on *Life is a Dream*. The opening was quite dramatic. The front of the stage was draped in tent-like fashion with black satiny cloth. Grashof stepped onstage, took the audience in, read a short statement written by Büchner, and then suddenly reached up and snatched away the black fabric to reveal a stage entirely covered and draped with red cloth: a Paris turned blood red by the events of the revolution. This was the single setting for the 30 locations. Within the proscenium was a framed area with a raised level about three feet high. This could be used for sitting or lying on, but was also used to create the impression of a stage.

The metatheatrical quality had been established by the appearance of Grashof at the beginning and was further developed by a performance within the "stage" early in the play. Throughout the play there was a sense of irony as people paraded across the stage or gave speeches within it. This theatricality was enhanced by the make-up which was far from realistic: most of the actors had white faces with bright red lips and broad streaks of red down the sides. The costumes were very effective, particularly those of the judges who seemed to have stepped right out of Daumier caricatures.

Music was an important element in the creating the metatheatrical quality as well. Roman Kaminski, who played Saint Juste/Camille Desmoulins/Young Man, moved in and out of the action to play the piano in front of the stage. He improvised (although it was clearly set after this long time) music in the style of Keith Jarrett. The sense of the actor moving from his role actor to that of musician emphasized the play-like nature of the whole event. The music was used to underline whole scenes, to create irony, and to provide a background for an occasional dance or dance-like movement. Particularly effective was the exit of two judges gaily heading toward their daily task of condemning people to death.

The action of the play moved inexorably toward the death of all the central figures, and the final scenes were memorable. The death of Danton

and his colleagues was played within the frame and as each was called, he stood up on the "stage," walked across and behind the draped side, and kneeled down. The sound of the guillotine was heard, and his hat was thrown onstage where the whores appropriated it. The final scene in which Lucille defies the times, and opts for her own death by shouting "Long live the king!" was given an effective twist. She stood absolutely still in the middle of the stage and barely above a whisper, flatly said, "Long live the king." In the hothouse atmosphere of the last stages of the revolution even such a little thing was enough to bring menacing authorities to surround her immediately.

The audience response to the play was lively throughout, with much appreciative laughter, but at the end of the play the response was staggering. I felt as if I were at the farewell performance of a Booth or Jefferson in the nineteenth century. The audience cheered and stood for eighteen minutes, threw bouquets, and the actors appeared and reappeared alone and as an ensemble. Finally the director, Alexander Lang, Volker Pfüller, and members of the stage crew were brought on so that about twenty-five people were excitedly cheered. This was a triumphant evening in the theatre.

Walking away from the theatre across the River Spree, I felt the enthusiasm of the excited theatregoers. The production was ultimately very simple, and it demonstrates the change in audience expectations and the perception of production demands in recent years. In *A Digest of 500 Plays* (1963), the play is described as requiring 32 location changes and as "not suitable for small or medium-sized theatre . . . Difficulties: requires a giant production . . . numerous crowd scenes." The concept devised by Lang and Pfüller brought forth all the excitement and tragedy without a giant production. I was reminded of a statement by Eugene O'Neill: "The audience will put up with anything we do, provided we do it well enough." The Deutsches Theater has the facilities, the talent, and the rehearsal conditions to "do it well enough" to thrill an audience of all ages and varying social backgrounds.

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The cast of *The Screens*, staged at the Guthrie Theater in 1989, directed by JoAnne Akalaitis. Photo by Michal Daniel.

The Screens, by Jean Genet. Directed by JoAnne Akalaitis. Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis. October-November 1989.

A remarkable event took place recently at perhaps the most established and best-known regional theatre in the U.S., an institution that has not forgotten how to take artistic risks. Director JoAnne Akalaitis and the Guthrie Theatre have succeeded admirably in bringing to the Midwest a difficult and complex play and, more importantly, in demonstrating once again that regional theatre can and should give us significant access to avant-garde work.

Genet's *The Screen* is seldom seen anywhere, due in large measure to its immense cast (roughly 98 characters) and length (17 scenes, which can take six hours, with a dinner break, to stage). The financial drain on a non-profit institution would in many cases be fatal, but this has not been the situation for the Guthrie, which apparently is experiencing a steady influx of grant monies and a marked increase in subscriptions. In fact, the healthy attendance at *The Screens* would suggest that the Guthrie staff successfully marketed the play to an audience unaccustomed to Genet (although not necessarily unwilling to view avant-garde work). It is an irony of the box office that some successful plays of the 1980's may have actually benefited from their size and length. Thus, despite *The Screens'* fundamental lack of similarity to *Les Misérables* or *Nicholas Nickleby*, the promise of an extended evening of

serious theatre might have been a drawing card. Moreover, it is conceivable that *The Screens*' political context, the Algerian revolution of the 1950's, piqued the interest of the Guthrie's audience. In preview material sent to subscribers, Ruth Maleczek, who played The Mother, was quoted as saying that the jumping-off point for *The Screens* is the struggle against colonialism we have seen in Palestine, Vietnam, and Afganistan: "Genet believed that once you've made that gesture--once you've accomplished your revolution--you're probably fated to repeat the gestures of the people who were your oppressors." Given the shallow, misleading accounts from the news media, which tend to attribute terrorism to the machinations of dictators and revolution to the "infiltration" of communists, one hopes that subscribers' curiosity was aroused by this more subtle view.

The real difficulty in staging *The Screens* lies in being true to the poetry of Genet's play while bringing it home to an audience that needs familiar landmarks. Genet has not made this easy. In a letter to Roger Blin, the first director of *The Screens*, Genet urged on the 1966 Paris production "a poetic combustion . . . so strong and dense that it will, by its implications and ramifications, illuminate the world of the dead--billions of billions--and that of generations yet unborn" (*Letters* 11). This spectacle, serious and beautiful, might only be seen by "a handful" of spectators, Genet acknowledged, but in the course of it we must work for the dead, who will blush at the sight of their own beauty. Yet, he goes on, this play has no meaning: "It's a celebration whose elements are disparate, it is the celebration of nothing" (14).

Genet deprives us of a recognizable revolutionary stance; nor does he glorify evil here, as he seems to do in other, more often seen, plays like *The Blacks*. The play, its characters and structure, all resist categorization and create instead an opacity of layered images which may have been the play's primary attraction for Akalaitis, who has retained its "poetic combustion" while adding her own allusive brand of political theatricality. Akalaitis has acknowledged that Genet may well have disliked her visibly feminist, liberationist politics. Still, I should add that he might have admired the production's detachment from the characters, its engrossing rhythms, the sparing but effective instances of Brechtian social gesture, and the bold, poetic use of caricature and profanity.

Paul Schmidt's translation, done specifically for this production, does not follow the familiar English edition published by Bernard Frechtman in 1962. In a panel discussion held during the Minneapolis run, Schmidt pointed out that a number of French versions exist, but no definitive text was imposed by Genet, who apparently cut scenes in the process of revision and offered them to anyone who might want to rewrite them. Schmidt produced sixteen scenes, divided after scene twelve by a dinner break. A prologue, which may have been added in rehearsal, consisted of a Brechtian announcement of the play's time and place delivered *ex machina* by a male voice. Then, gradually, unobtrusively, the actors began to appear. To the opening music (composed

by Philip Glass and Foday Musa Suso, and performed by the Electric Arab Orchestra) the actors accumulated their numbers, then advanced on the audience, looking through us fiercely. Out of synch with their slow-motion advance, first one actor, then another, made a quick hand motion, as though brushing away flies visible only in another dimension. This intriguing visual image prepared us in some way for the direct, occasionally colloquial poetry of Schmidt's translation. By his own account, he "looked for a . . . language that an American audience could find itself in" and thus perceive the characters as human beings. To this end he also made use of the idioms of American xenophobia, by putting into the mouths of the French colonialists complaints about those "thieving Ay-rabs". (In passing, Schmidt thanked his army sergeant, whose ability to swear poetically apparently impressed Schmidt enough to cast an influence on this script years later.) Certainly the profanity in *The Screens* does not seem designed to shock; Schmidt has been successful in creating a poetic American idiom that relies on no single dialect.

As this new translation demonstrates, the Guthrie spared neither time nor expense on the production. A relatively short run of nineteen performances was preceded by seven weeks of rehearsal and a week of previews. To accommodate this special event the Guthrie staff reorganized the 1989-90 season. The production seemed to use every inch of the Guthrie's extensive stage space; in fact, it extended the space by playing some of the action in the aisles at either side of the stage. This panoramic perspective was initially suggested to the spectator by the net suspended overhead which extended from the rear of the stage to the first few rows of seats. The net, empty for most of the play, became in the final scenes Genet's third level of screens, the land of the dead. One by one, characters broke through papered doorways and fell toward us into the net, exclaiming with obvious pleasure, "Well, what do you know!" As the net gradually filled up, figures lounged over our heads, observing and commenting on events. The dead seemed to have reached a refuge of sorts, while, below, we looked into a void suspended between the webbing of the net and the burlap-covered stage. Throughout the first half of the play, backdrops had been removed so that we seemed to look further into this void, only partially masked by human-sized, translucent screens on which the images of revolution were being painted. Thus, revolutionary acts did not seem to fill the stage, as Genet may originally have intended, but to come and go in an impassive emptiness.

Set and props designer George Tsypin is to be congratulated on the ingenuity and simplicity of this difficult design, enhanced by the lighting of Jennifer Tipton and the costumes of Eiko Ishioka. The latter mingled Genet's original suggestions (the Mother in yellow and purple) with understated colors for the other Arab characters and the French soldiers (beige, white, black), while the prostitute Varda was housed in an immobile gold caricature of a nineteenth-century ball gown at least ten feet in diameter. Although her face was whitened and she picked her teeth with a foot-long hatpin, as Genet had

indicated, Varda little resembled the chilly religious figure of Blin's production. Making love to this Varda is an obeisance not to European church and nation-state, but to the excesses of a self-protective and immovable economy of profit. Ishioka's costumes expanded Genet's intention to mingle the styles of nineteenth and twentieth-century France. That intention was not displaced --in the panoply of nineteenth-century costumes we can still see how the revolution brings the events of 1789 full circle--but to this circle Ishioka added oriental and American touches. The couples who took turns pinning medals on their family mannequins seemed to be modeled on the affluent figures of the Kennedy years, the women in A-line skirts and pillbox hats. Sir Harold --in plaid green jacket and grotesque white pan--taloons--marched about awkwardly on elevator shoes. Likewise, Mr. Blankensee was a grotesque Abraham Lincoln, a totem balanced precariously between his elevator shoes and stovepipe hat. Commiserating on their lives as slave owners, oblivious to the flames of revolution being painted on the screens around them, these two figures seemed to draw the events of American history into the circle. Genet might have objected to these caricatures, saying, as he did in 1966, "I can assure you that I did not, for example, look down on any of my characters--be it Sir Harold, the Gendarme, or the Paratroopers. You can be sure that I have never tried to 'understand' them, but, having created them, on paper and for the stage, I do not want to deny them. What binds me to them is something other than irony or contempt. They also help to shape me" (67). One wonders if the images in which Ishioka costumed these characters were drawn in part, like Schmidt's script, from the common cultural denominators of American life: the icons of freedom that don't seem to apply outside the West, the gold lame' of a culture often defined in terms of money.

Nor did this production have to look exclusively to Africa for images of a dispossessed underclass. Jesse Borrego (Said), a founding member of the Sol/Sun Experimental Theatre of San Antonio, is better known for his work on the television series *Fame*, a program which touched on issues of the disenfranchised in the context of an urban performing arts school. Said's exaggerated, even palsied, trembling before the "master" was that of someone who does not fear Sir Harold's empty authority and responds to it with an equally empty show of subservience. Habib, played by Gregory Wallace, alternated between a Step-n-Fetch-It falsetto, used for the master, and his deeper voice. Colonialist and "native" exist for one another only in the mutual terms of oppression--as Frantz Fanon says in *The Wretched of the Earth*, each creates the other in a vicious exchange of dualities--and in this production the colonialists were clearly caricatures from whom we could distance ourselves.

The primary figures of Said, his ugly wife Leila (Lauren Tom), and Said's mother, however, were more difficult to accept or dismiss. Said and the Mother were first seen on the way to his wedding. Genet allows us far enough into this world of dispossession to let us see these characters enjoying the irony of dropping the suitcase and breaking pathetic gifts which turn out to be

imaginary, unaffordable. Said follows his wedding with a visit to Varda, the town madam, but this irony is accompanied by another: of putting a dollar value on a wife's beauty (an American obsession of long standing). Leila berates herself, and is continually insulted by her new husband and mother-in-law, for her ugliness, which was hidden in this production behind a graceful black *abayeh* covering everything but eyes and mouth. Leila's ugliness is actually a rallying point for these three, a sorrow and a shame that becomes a virtue, something permanent and impersonal, something that the oppressor cannot possess or take away. The power of this unseen ugliness was enhanced by Tom's lithe movements in her encompassing black layers, which occasionally were reversed or twisted, but never seemed to inhibit her. When, at her death, her *abayeh* settled to the floor, the substance of Leila seemed to disappear. Just as striking was Tom's voice: high-pitched, nasal, limited to a narrow range, whining but persistent, as though the voice had more strength than the rest of the body. Thus, the uglier, the more fly-ridden--the more beautiful and powerful.

Neither revolutionary nor lackey, Said steals, goes to prison, betrays the Algerian revolutionaries to the French soldiers--in short, rejects the dual options which colonialism and revolution, mirror images, offer him. Spurning them as thieves, the other Arabs reject him and Leila, and will not allow the Mother to mourn at the grave of the revolutionary leader Si Slimane. Ruth Maleczek (like Akalaitis, a founding member of Mabou Mines) was most effective as the Mother; like Said and Leila, the Mother lives outside the options of revolution and oppression, preying first on one oppressor, then the other. As Fanon noted, the "native" who is ready to remove and replace the colonialist often turns to prey on the easier target, his fellow "natives," who expect and seek out no justice. As a woman and a mother, Maleczek seemed to be this double victim. When, late in the play, the Mother strangled the French soldier with the straps of his own backpack, Maleczek did it abstractedly, without malice, as though she were the vague nurturer the soldier took her to be. But in the Mother's presence the fierce, funny dream world that makes up half the natives' existence seemed to take shape. She was a locus of anger in this play, as was the revolutionary Khadija (Isabell Monk). When the Mother is left adrift in the land of the dead, wondering why Said and Leila do not appear, we see once again how Akalaitis has taken every opportunity this play offers to undermine stereotypes of women and men, and of revolution, and to offer instead an unexpected, inconclusive turn of events.

This is not, strictly speaking, the story of Said, or the Mother, or any single character, but an epic, played here by a company of fifty. The sixteen scenes extending from 1950 to 1962 flowed one into the other, giving no precise sense of history. Brecht might have labeled them in a deliberate effort to break the dramatic flow. Of course, Genet did not share Brecht's political goals and thus was not faced with the dilemmas of dialectical structure and the distanced character. For him the *Verfremdungseffekt* was simply "the

refusal of a natural sham," the goal of which refusal is "a new joy, a new festivity, and God knows what besides" (*Letters* 72). Genet's characters have nothing to lose; nor do they have any obligation to please or displease us by the end of the evening. Thus, Maleczek's uninhibited, unsterotypical Mother was free to urge Said to serve no purpose, to "shit on them."

At the panel discussion mentioned above (a public part of a weekend symposium offered by the Guthrie on *The Screens*), the participants were asked about this final scene of the production. The artists' choice to depart from the beauty of the previous scenes seemed to distress spectators who felt that the tenor of ironic joy should be maintained. Sitting with Akalaitis, Schmidt, Ishioka, and Tipton, dramaturg Colette Brooks remarked that resolution was not necessarily desirable and in fact made her uncomfortable. The audience should have to grapple with the fact that Said and Leila never arrive in the land of the dead.

The Guthrie production drew us, bit by bit, into the spectacle of mutual destruction that results when the dispossessed and the possessed coexist in the same space. "We" see the dispossessed in "our" streets every day. Who do we see? What do they see in us? As Fredric Jameson has pointed out, in "the world space of multinational capital" representation has lost its bearings. Avant-garde theatre can provide "cognitive maps" to help us "grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle" (92). The Guthrie production of *The Screens* offered us one such cognitive map. Originally aimed at a French audience painfully aware of a recent colonial defeat, this play foregrounds the colonialist in each of us. Its surfaces, brimming with thwarted stereotypes, resonate in this country too, where the government cannot focus its attention upon the homeless and often claims to have difficulty with its "intelligence" in the Middle East.

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The Price. By Arthur Miller. Morosco Theatre, New York, 1968; Young Vic Theatre, London, 1990.

Arthur Miller's *The Price* (1968) has been revived by the Young Vic Theatre Company in London. The production and the programme compare interestingly with the original presentation of *The Price* at New York's Morosco Theatre.

The Morosco "Playbill" features on its cover a photograph of the set (the attic of a Manhattan brownstone soon to be torn down) and of the four characters: from left to right Esther Franz (Kate Reid), her husband Police-Sergeant Victor Franz (Pat Hingle), used-furniture dealer Gregory Solomon (Harold Gary) and Victor's brother Walter Franz (Arthur Kennedy). Victor is isolated from the others by his clothing. He wears his policeman's uniform in such a way as to suggest that he is not interested in clothes or in surfaces or indeed in material things. The trousers sag, the jacket is crumpled and, perhaps in token defiance of his public role, Victor sports a vest that doesn't match the suit and can't be part of the uniform. The other three are elegantly dressed. They are stereotyped in a way Victor is not. They are all committed to varieties of status and to the symbols of status.

The picture precisely represents the thrust of the original production. By observing Miller's stated preference (in his production note) for an unbroken performance, the 1968 production had Victor on stage for all but the last minute of the last act. He became the focus and fulcrum of the play, a figure of endurance. The other characters became accessories. Pat Hingle played Victor with dignity and gave him an other-directed thoughtfulness which contrasted favorably with his brother Walter's self-referential volatility. It should be noted, however, that Victor's centrality violated Miller's intention that Victor and Walter should be given equal weight and equal value in the production.

In the Young Vic production the Morosco's proscenium arch gave way to theatre-in-the-round. A good deal was initially lost here, as Miller's important early stage direction that "the room is progressively seen" could not be observed. For the audience to get to their seats they had to see the set, and had formed their own sense of the former Franz home before the play formally began. Undramatically, they had in effect toured an antique shop. The Young Vic audience was also directed by the folio size programme and by the programme notes. The cover featured a large photograph of Miller by Morath: the cult of personalities prevailed over the action. The programme's introduction by the director of the Arthur Miller Centre at the University of East Anglia (there is such a centre) tended toward cult and cliché: "Something happened in America in 1929. The birds came home to roost."

As this production had an intermission between Acts I and II it was curious that the play proceeded at such a hectic pace. There was a good deal of playing for laughs; the audience had been alerted by the programme note

that Gregory Solomon (Alan MacNaughten) was "one of the great comic inventions for postwar American Theatre." To play him only as such subverted the text disastrously, distracting attention from Solomon's sensitive, sad support of Victor (David Culler) and his simultaneous status as the reincarnation of Victor's deceitful father. Solomon's motif speeches--for instance, his contention that "with used furniture you cannot be emotional"--were received with considerable amusement.

Victor was diminished in this production, set apart as the loser. He was played as a red-faced lumbering individual whose idiom and intonations were inferior to Bob Peck's Walter. His clumsy manipulation of his gunbelt was symptomatic of his lack of mental agility. The production's strength lay in Marjorie Yates' performance as Esther (who was not mentioned in the programme's introduction). It can certainly be argued that it is Esther's destiny which is at stake in the play. Walter and Victor only go through the motions of revelation. They have nothing new to say to each other or to learn from each other. But Esther whose relationships and perceptions are, at the outset of the play, alarmingly unstable, has to assimilate the knowledge that Walter argued himself out of helping Victor through school and that Victor knowingly denied himself a career in science in order, hopelessly, to prove the existence of love to his loveless and unlovable father. In Act I Esther savages Victor; by the end of Act II she sees him as the superior man. "Nothing was sacrificed" she tells Walter. She comes to defend Victor with the fatalistic passion that led Victor to devote himself to the father who so ruthlessly exploited him. It is one of the play's and this production's nicest ironies that Esther finally affirms Victor's moral worth not in spite of but because of the priorities which made him put his father's welfare before her's.

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